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ABSTRACT

In this paper, a college English professor shares his teaching experiences in a Hybrid Electronic Course (HEC), which combined traditional classroom meetings with e-mail-based workshops. The paper includes a general description of the course, the instructor's daily journals throughout the course, and his reflections following the course. Many of his colleagues taught pure Internet-based composition courses, and many voiced concerns about the lack of common physical "community" activities within such courses. The author's idea was to develop an HEC that would combine the best of both worlds. His plan was to develop scheduled face-to-face class meetings (as an entire group) for the first two weeks and then gradually turn the students loose to work on their research paper assignments and projects. Students would be able to send him their papers via e-mail attachments. He had been accepting drafts and dialoguing with students through e-mail for several years; this use of e-mail as the class "medium" seemed like a natural next step. The HEC format seemed to create more personal interaction with students than traditionally scheduled courses. But it also seemed to be more difficult to teach writing using a distance-learning model. (JA)

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My ENG 102 Class has gone to HEC: Creating the Hybrid Electronic Course

By Jeff ROSS, CAC-SMC

A paper submitted to the Central Arizona College Special Task Force for On line Courses
August 28, 2000

The "focus" of my ENG 102 classes at Central is a 2000-word academic "research paper" based on some topic concerning education (also known as the R-1 assignment). Students write three 500-word essays which help them develop the larger research paper assignment. The E-1 constitutes a brief research proposal. In the E-1, the student is asked to address the purpose and focus of the future R-1. He/she is encouraged to discuss the scope of the project, research strategies, possible sources, and possible research problems. The E-2 and E-3 are both literature review papers: students are asked to assess and react to the sources (print, electronic, interviews, observations, or surveys) they tentatively plan to use in the larger paper. Each student also produces a 10-entry journal. Each journal entry contains a 100-word summary/100 word reaction based on a source a student had researched and read. (My intention is for the journal entries to provide the "fuel" for the E-2 and E-3 essays and then, eventually, the R-1 paper.)
After the R-1 is finished, or nearly finished, I ask students to write a 500 word E-4 paper in which they reflect on the entire R-1 project. (The E-4 is meant to be a reflection of the research paper writing process itself-- a type of immediate written self-assessment.

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Many of my colleagues have been teaching pure internet-based composition courses, many and voiced concerns about the lack of common physical "community" activities within such courses. My idea was to develop a HEC that would combine the best of both worlds: The following is the daily journal I maintained during June 2000.

For the summer 2000 session, I scheduled a three-week English 102-workshop class that would combine traditional classroom meetings with the ease of e-mail and learner centeredness. My plan was to develop scheduled face-to-face class meetings (as an entire group) for the first two weeks or so and then gradually turn the students loose to work on their research paper assignments and projects. The early part of the class would be devoted to discussing topics such as researching web sites, APA style, and developing strategies for writing academic text. The course would be web-enhanced: I have a maintained professional home page that includes my syllabi, assessment information, relevant on-line handouts, and other appropriate web links. Students would be able to send me their papers via Email attachments. I have been accepting drafts and dialoguing with my students through email for several years; this use of email as the class "medium" seemed like a natural next step.

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As a class, we immediately decided to modify the syllabus schedule some. We would stick with the original three-week schedule, but the students would have the summer session's final two weeks to complete the R-1 project and their E-4 Reflective appendix



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assignment. Since I would be in Michigan during that last two-week period, I knew that I would have to prepare my laptop for Internet use. I arranged with the registrar's office to fax in my grade sheet. Here is what happened summer 2K:

Day 1

No one was too shocked at the direction I planned to take in the course. Our summer session schedule had contained a note just under the course schedule entry, which read "E mail based workshop." Nothing new or fancy in that! Today, I demonstrated accessing my web page and showed students examples of previous student work done in my English 102 classes. I also showed them the online version of their textbook and we followed some of the web links provided by the textbook publisher. I had developed a Power Point slide show, which showed them how their first essay (the E-1) might be constructed. I also reviewed the print version of textbook in class and attempted to sing the praises of what we were trying to do in this HEC. I demonstrated the Microsoft Word 2000 Insert Comment function and explained how I would be responding this feature to respond to their papers. I also recommended they save all texts as rich text files (.rtf extensions) to help preclude some possible difficulties down the road. We discussed modifying the schedule somewhat. This first day was like many first days in the college classroom. Amazingly, I had journal entries waiting in my Lotus Notes (our district's dedicated email platform) In Box when I returned to the office!

Day 2

I brought in a floppy for each of my students that contained more examples of student work. I introduced APA style format today. Most of the students were familiar with MLA but not APA. The CAC-SMC librarian, Julie Chillet-Villa, came over and discussed Info Track and the Electric Library with the class. She also went over hotmail email accounts and how file attachments could be sent using hotmail.

I passed out sheets listing other good "educational research" web sites (ERIC, Northernlight.com, Ed.web, Ed.com and other electronic sources). We also did some searching in the ERIC database, both abstracts and digests. (I have a LCD projector in the classroom, which is very helpful for demonstrations.) We also went over one of the student's E-1 drafts and commented on its strengths and weaknesses as a proposal.
I had more journal entries in my Inbox when I returned to the office!

Day 3

Today, I let the students work on their E-1 papers. I learned that two of the students did not know how to attach files. I had the students practice sending documents to me via attachment commands. I found I could not access Lotus Notes from the teacher's station computer in room 313. The two students and I made walking trips back and forth from the room to my office where I could access my own computer and check their emails. I was also able to give some one on one attention to them at their workstations.
I had more journal entries in my inbox when I returned to the office.

Weekend 1

Now I know why Internet course instructors complain about the workload. Every time I turn on the computer—more stuff! I spent quite a bit of the weekend reading and responding to emails—some attachments are still not coming in readable form. I sent messages to several students telling them to bring me hard copies on Monday.
Even so, I have been able to use the Word Insert Comment feature successfully on many of the journal and E-1 papers I have received and returned. I have also experimented with different filing and accessing methods. I think I am going to save their attachments to the A drive to simplify matters. I have also been dealing with some computer problems at home—memory error messages and such—so I have decided to make my laptop Internet ready just in case of desktop failure. I went down to the Gateway Country Store and ordered more RAM.

We need to get the attachment and "save to rich text version" issues resolved. I spent a lot of time unscrambling, cutting, and pasting e-mail messages this weekend.

Ugh, I also learned that my home computer was infected with the KAK.worm virus so I spent hours trying to repair that problem.

Days 4 and 5

More "normal" days. We continued working out the attachment problems. I learned how to access my Lotus Notes account from the workstation in SMC Room 313 so we will not have to walk across campus anymore. On both of these days I spent the first hour lecturing on APA style, paraphrasing, setting up quotations, reference pages, on line links to APA, and other paper formatting issues. We also reviewed several student journal entries and early essay pieces. The students began to ask questions about citations and the mechanics of research paper writing. They were much less nervous about the electronic aspects of the course. At home, using the Norton Symantec Anti-virus download, I eradicated the Worm.

Day 6

A break through day. I spent the first hour lecturing about interviewing techniques, interview data collection, and related issues. We also touched upon constructing abstracts and appendices to the big paper. During the second hour, I figured out the password (!) on the instructor's computer so that we could use the printer in Room 313 and look at hard copies. The students' faces had looks of amazement! We were dealing with paper copies of drafts again-- a throwback to the 20th century! How easy it was to review and correct reference page entries immediately and in thorough fashion. I made some written remarks on papers and told them to bring back revised hard copies tomorrow. Because I emphasized electronic files so early in the course, and because most of our editing/revising had been done using the Insert Window of WORD 2000, the students had forgotten (or repressed) the printed page as a tool! Hybridization has occurred on Day 6.

The group is doing well and is producing readable research texts at a faster rate than I would have believed possible. Many still wondered-- is this an English class or a computer class? Long Live HEC!

Day 7

A calm workshop day. I have now received emails from all of my students and catalogued their addresses. One thing I have not done is to ask them to share drafts in either hard copy or electronic form. I have shown some real time class essays using the LCD projector, and I have made hard copies of certain student essays to distribute to the class. However, they have not shared drafts with each other for drafting or reviewing purposes.

Weekend 2

I downloaded the Microsoft e-mail security patch from their web site. I also had my laptop upgraded to 56K ram. I am having some trouble getting Gateway.net to load on the machine. (I have Gateway.net on my home desktop.)

On student emailed her R-1 draft. It looks good-- nearly finished in record time! She had not completed her appendix (interview not completed) but her over all product looks very good.

I am still receiving some garbled text from one or two students. We are at a loss to explain this. E-3 roughs and journal entries keep appearing in my In Box

Day 8

A calm workshop day. I dealt with individual questions about APA matters, interview formatting, appendix creation, and some attachment concerns. I finally figured out how to log in the students so they could print off hard copies from their own computers. The feed back from the day was most interesting. The students like the power and ease of sending me drafts electronically for review, but they also appreciate the face-to-face contact of the traditional class. The group decided that a regular 16-week ENG 102 course done electronically (pure Internet or hybrid) should meet face-to-face once a week. The students were sensitive to the issues of group input, q/a sessions, complex explanations, and the sense of community.

Day 9

More printing and reviewing. The E-3's are nearly completed. One student has negotiated a different approach to the assignments. Instead of writing the E-2 and the E-3, he was constantly working on a ten-source R-1. The students are concerned less with the electronic aspects of the course now and are more concerned with the quality of their written work.

I successfully downloaded Net zero onto a zip floppy and then took the floppy home. I then loaded the Net zero program onto my laptop and made it online. Now I have

Gateway.net on my desktop and Net zero on my laptop. I can access our school's Lotus Notes web site from both.

Day 10

Today I reviewed some previously constructed E-4's using the LCD projection unit. I also reviewed one student's E-3 paper and tried to make some recommendations about the abstract and the reference page that would be helpful to both her and the other students. One student, who uses hotmail, had called up an email (from an interviewee) she had received and read earlier. The email message contained a statement that an attachment (the interview responses, no doubt) had been saved to C/Eudora/folder. Hmm. Therefore, she went home to check her own C drive to see if the attachment had indeed been saved there. She sent me an email later telling me that she couldn't find the email anywhere on her hard drives. She also told me that, fortunately, her "back-up" interviewee replied successfully.

Day 11

Today students had me look at printed versions of their R-1 drafts. I am very pleased with the quality of the drafts. Many students are confronting small issues: still missing a reference or two (ten required), an interviewee has cancelled out, a computer has failed. But things are looking good. The class is showing the wear and tear of working on this project for 17 straight days. We also looked at a couple R-1 samples (theirs and archived models) using the LCD.

Weekend 3

I received just a very few emails, mostly bits and pieces of R-1's and reference pages to review. Strangely, many of the texts still come over garbled. We have reviewed and re-reviewed how to send attachments in class, but a lot of this stuff still comes over garbled. If I don't see the paper clip symbol in the email In Box, I know I am in trouble. Strangely, a couple of the students who have this problem when sending email attachments from their home computers do not have the problem when they send email attachments from our college's computers. Very strange. (This problem was never satisfactorily resolved.)

I checked into CAC's Lotus Notes web site using Netzero on my laptop and I was able to carry out all file management and email functions successfully. Good to know. I am almost certain my students will finish course outcomes by Wednesday (the last scheduled day of face to face class) anyway, but I am pleased with having the capability to access Notes from anywhere.

Days 12-14

Each day was much the same—a rush to the end. I looked at printed versions of E-4's and R-1's in class and took home freshly printed versions to review again. Most of our conversations have focused on the construction of abstracts, reference pages, and fine-

tuning appendices and other "peripheral texts. The actual body texts of their papers look good.

The students are anxious to be done. The E-4's, their R-1 project reflection papers, contained phrases like

- "English Boot Camp "
- 16 weeks crammed into 3"
- " I learned lots about both English and computer skills"
- "I've got to become more computer literate"
- "Sprinting through 102"
- "The web is filled with geeks who know less about computers than I do"
- "I've never had so much homework in my life"
- "Too many flashing buttons and junk on web sites"
- "Thank goodness for librarians"
- "If I finish this class I can do anything!"
- Countless other colorful evaluative remarks

By now, we were using quite a bit of paper during this HEC course.

Day 15

The students who hadn't finished came to class and worked on their projects. By the end of the class, everyone was done except one student. She assured me she would email her R-1 to me on Monday.

Day 16

In Rochester, Michigan.
I spent three hours trying to log on to Netzero and then CAC Lotus Notes. I finally got in—apparently, this telephone system requires 11-digit dialing even within the same area code. (I didn't receive the last R-1, but I did the following Monday. Class complete! Good papers! Outcomes met!)

July, 2000 My reflections following the Summer 2000 HEC ENG 102 course
(Not in ranked order)

1. Students like face-to-face contact—especially at the one-to-one level—early in a course when they are learning to become learners.
2. Students like the power, ease, efficiency, and time-friendliness afforded by the internet
3. I saw accelerated student learning taking place using the HEC format.
4. The HEC format creates more, not less, person interaction with students (when compared to the traditionally scheduled course).
5. It seems to be more difficult to teach writing using a distance-learning model, especially when face-to-face contact cannot or does not occur.

6. Technology can impede student learning
7. Technology can assist student learning
8. Current notions about seat time and attendance (Carnegie unit issues) are outdated and inappropriate and should be replaced with a more vibrant paradigm.
9. HEC classes of some variety are the "wave" of the future.
10. Computer Internet technology is still developing and does not provide seamless service between workstations.
11. Public school and community college teachers are gradually becoming valued for their ability to "teach" technology. Subject matter knowledge will be less important in our society. Multi media savvy will come to be valued more than intellectual ability.
12. Accessing information is not the same as knowing information.
13. Handwritten remarks and face-to-face conferencing can be enhanced by word processing automated reviewing functions such as Insert Comment.
14. Despite anecdotal and "scholarly" evidence to the contrary, most students (of all ages) coming into the electronic classroom at CAC-SMC have difficulty with basic computer literacy skills such as saving files, copying files, managing files, creating email attachments, and book marking web pages. Many are quite adept and chat room usage.

I thoroughly enjoyed this experience and I will continue to experiment with appropriate scheduling and Internet usage in my composition classes.